

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Ernie Barnett
Director, Everglades Policy and Coordination

DATE: August 9, 2012

SUBJECT: Conceptual Approval of Proposed Land Exchange with Palm Beach County For the Mecca Farms Parcel

Background:

In June 2012, the FDEP and District, in consultation with USEPA, developed an alternative technical plan to meet water quality standards in the Everglades Protection Area. The State's proposal also set forth a suite of water quality projects designed to achieve water quality standards. The State's proposed projects are spread out over three flow paths: Eastern, Central, and Western. The identified projects include STA expansion, like USEPA proposes, but on a much smaller scale (6,500 acres versus 42,000 acres). Instead, the State's plan incorporates Flow Equalization Basins (FEBs) in order to lower phosphorus concentrations in STA discharges. These large water impoundments attenuate peak stormwater flows prior to delivery to STAs (thereby significantly improving STA performance), and provide dry season benefits by reducing dryouts of the STAs plant communities. A key component of the plan involves the use of the L-8 Reservoir for the FEB in the Eastern Flow Path. In order to use the L-8 Reservoir for this purpose, the district needs to acquire and construct replacement storage to capture excess flows from C-18 western basin and then discharge those flows to the Loxahatchee River at required volumes and times. An appropriate site currently owned by Palm Beach County was identified as an excellent location to construct the reservoir.

Staff entered into a non-binding Letter of Intent with Palm Beach County, dated May 23, 2012, proposing a land exchange between the parties.

Under the current proposal, the South Florida Water Management District will acquire from Palm Beach County approximately 1,920 acres of land in Palm Beach County, formerly known as the Mecca Farms Parcel, as identified in attached Exhibit A. In exchange, the South Florida Water Management District will convey to Palm Beach County five properties totaling approximately 1,495 acres of land in Palm Beach County, as identified in attached Exhibit B. Additionally, the South Florida Water Management District will supplement the land exchange with a cash payment in the amount of \$30,000,000 to roughly equalize the estimated values of the exchange parcels. The District will obtain an appraisal of all the exchange parcels to support the proposed transaction.

It is desirable that both the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District and the Board of County Commissioners of Palm Beach County conceptually approve the proposed transaction before the parties proceed with the negotiation of a Land Exchange Agreement to be brought back to this Governing Board and the Palm Beach County Commission for review and approval.

How this helps meet the District's 10-year Strategic Plan:

The Mecca Farms parcel will play a pivotal link in Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration by providing fresh water flows to the Loxahatchee River while satisfying other water-related needs. The plan to achieve the minimum flows and levels for the Loxahatchee River is the CERP project. Incorporating an in-basin reservoir provides an effective and efficient solution to achieving minimum flows and levels while improving the deliveries of water needed for restoration of the freshwater portions of the Loxahatchee River.

Funding Source: Prior year Save Our Everglades Trust Fund dollars will be used for the cash payment.

This Board item impacts what areas of the District, both resource areas and geography:

This item benefits the Loxahatchee River Watershed, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and the Northern Palm Beach County area.

What concerns could this Board item raise?

This acquisition will require \$30 million from an existing State appropriation from the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund. However, the amount of cash has been substantially reduced by using approximately 1,495 acres of District lands to be surplus in exchange for the Mecca Farms parcel.

Why should the Governing Board approve this item?

This acquisition will provide substantial environmental benefits to the Loxahatchee River Watershed and enable permanent use of the L-8 Reservoir for the Everglades Restoration Strategies Project.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at ext. 2110.

EB

Attachments: Resolution, Mecca Farms Map (Exhibit A), District Exchange Map (Exhibit B)